

worship Christ but who like the false monarch who was their prototype were really bent upon destroying Him. Christ's enemies became the men of His own house, and a new sad proof of the supernatural origin of Christianity was afforded by the failure of misguided controversy and narrow aims to shake it from its firm foundation. From these bitter trials Christianity again emerged to shine with greater lustre than ever in the glorious era of the Reformation. Every student of history knows in what malignant forms the spirit of Herod manifested itself at that time; how the Anti-Christian power which in earlier ages had lodged itself in Pagan Rome reappeared with still more subtle energy in Papal Rome, from whose Vatican the thunderous Anathemas seemed to echo through the whole world. We remember how the way was prepared for the great awakening by men like Huss, Savonarola, Wycliff, "the morning Star of the Reformation," till Luther appeared to meet the claims of the Church by an appeal to the inalienable rights of the individual conscience. All the old tyrannies were repeated. Thousands of noble men perished in the dungeon, at the stake, upon the field of battle. The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church, and the blind fury which went forth to its work of indiscriminate slaughter was utterly baffled in the attempt to extirpate the spirit of Christ from mankind. The young child had found a safe asylum from the furious assaults of pride and iniquity and the strength of the enemy was spent in vain. The Herod-power which sat upon the world's throne was mocked, not of the wise men who came from far and near to lay their treasures at the young child's feet, but mocked by God who fulfilled the prediction made of old time against those who would attempt to overthrow the kingdom of His Son: "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." With the birth of modern philosophy, another epoch of opposition begins. The world had not yet learned the sublime lesson which the Magi taught, that the wisdom of earth may well acknowledge the wonder of Heaven, and that science finds her true goal when guided by the Divine light she falls in humble adoration at the feet of Christ! A malignant and virulose current of criticism began to manifest itself in the literature of the day. Men spoke of Christ and wrote of Christ in a manner at which the scepticism of our time would honestly shudder. A spirit of cold, unsympathetic analysis of the Divine life and mission is succeeded, especially in France, by the outbreak of turbulent passion and undisguised hatred of the Nazarene which led at length to the enthronement of the goddess of Reason in the person of a prostitute, and the fearful Nemesis of Anti-Christian principles in the horrors of the French Revolution. Then as we advance to our own century we find the destructive spirit manifesting itself in what seems a much less repellant form, but one which really strikes at the very heart of Christ and seeks to rob Him of all those attributes which make Him the real Saviour of the world. The rude attacks of Voltaire and Paine are exchanged for a subtle scepticism which reduced both the testimony of the Gospels and the testimony of the human heart to forms of unreliable fiction. Paulus eliminates the miraculous from the story of the Evangelists, attributing the idea of the supernatural to the grossest ignorance, and so destroying at a blow the Divine mission of the Son of God. Strauss arose subsequently as the exponent of a mythical interpretation, the Gospel history being in his view nothing more than the adaptation of a narrative to preconceived ideas; so that Christ is an ordinary person whom national prejudice or pious expectation had magnified into an ideal. And later still we have Rénan who in an undertone of real sadness declares his disbelief in the grounds of revelation and his forced dissent from those Christian saints

whose characters he regards as the purest in the world. Here we have antagonism which though pronounced is not bitter,—the mournful spectacle of doubt mingled with despair. In our own day the Anti-Christian spirit manifests itself in a variety of forms from the Secularism of the masses to the Agnosticism and Pantheism of the philosophers. It is true that the abuse and calumny of earlier ages have passed away except on the lips of those ignorant demagogues whose coarse blasphemy is its own reputation. The Herod spirit does not seem to manifest itself in the blind fury of indiscriminate slaughter. There is even the semblance of worship sometimes at the Holy Shrine of Christ. But at heart none the less, there is rank rebellion and fierce enmity. Not merely in the thoughtless outcry of the mob always ready to follow the most blatant leader, but in the subtle innuendoes of the would be sages, in the frequent tendency of current thought, in the materialistic earthiness of this modern age, the name the Christ is blasphemed and His right denied to a universal kingship over the lives of men.

And what has been the result of all this continued opposition to Christ and His Gospel? Surely by this time it must be stamped out altogether, for it has been subjected to every kind of attack which human hatred and subtlety could devise, or human power carry into execution. No system which has contended for supremacy in the hearts of men has ever encountered so much fierce and bitter opposition; for it has been the supreme irony of history that the Saviour came unto His own, and His own received him not, but rather echoed in a thousand forms the outcry of the brutal Judæan mob, crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting Him to an open shame. Yet Christ and His Gospel have not yet begun to show the symptoms of decay and dissolution. The attack has been more than met not by weapons of like construction, but by the irresistible force of Divine Truth. Men looked upon the feeble beginnings of Christianity and thought at first that it was scarcely deserving of serious attraction. But when the stone cut of the mountains without hands began to grow mysteriously, the world-monarchies tried to crush it and tried in vain. The young child seemed to lead a charmed life, for persecution and bloodshed while destroying His followers, served only to extend His influence over the hearts of men. And when the violence of the pen succeeded the violence of the sword the attack was equally a futile one. Neither gross calumny nor subtle innuendo; neither blind prejudice nor ignorant superstition; neither the coarse effrontery of the vulgar nor the cold denial and mournful silence of philosophy has disturbed the majestic sway at Christ the Lord. The history of opposition has been one of complete failure from first to last. The angel-voice is true in fact as it shall be true in prophecy:—"They are dead—they shall die, who seek the young child's life."

And what is the reason of this strangest phenomenon in all history, the decay and death of the spirit of Herod and the immortal youth of the spirit of Christ? The answers of infidelity are manifestly insufficient. Gibbon's well-known reasons might possibly explain a momentary triumph but not a continuance through all the changeful centuries. For while the years come and go, Christ remains the same yesterday and to-day and forever, striking the roots of His glorious Gospel ever more deeply into the soil of human hearts, and gradually diffusing the heavenly brightness which hung at first above the manger at Bethlehem over the whole wide world. There must be some deeper reason for the failure of anti-christian principles, for they have everything as it seemed in its favour, and a Gospel of merely human origin would have succumbed long ago to the crushing opposition which it encountered everywhere, and would have been interesting only to the student of history as an effete system which